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Chairman: Mr. PETRESKI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

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AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (A/50/3, A/50/126, E/1995/20, A/50/126/Add.1-E/1995/20/Add.1, A/50/132, A/50/179-E/1995/57, A/50/180-E/1995/61, A/50/213-E/1995/67, A/50/262-E/1995/69; A/C.2/50/L.3 and L.4)

1. Mr. BERTROZZI (World Health Organization (WHO)), introducing the report of the Director-General of WHO on progress in the implementation of the global AIDS strategy (A/50/179-E/1995/57), said that it was divided into three main sections. The first consisted of an overview of the AIDS epidemic as of mid-1995 while the second dealt with activities carried out in 1993-1994 by the WHO Global Programme on AIDS and summarized the activities undertaken by the Organization's two main divisions, the technical cooperation division and the division on research intervention and development.

2. Highlighting the work carried out by the units of those divisions, he noted that the health care and support unit had been shifting its substantial focus towards in-home and community care for persons living with HIV/AIDS, while the surveillance evaluation and forecasting unit had been monitoring sentinel HIV surveillance and supporting HIV surveillance programmes in 80 developing countries. The clinical research and product development unit had been focusing primarily on the development of vaginal microbicides aimed at preventing the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. The vaccine development unit had, for its part, been working on the development of vaccine evaluations at sites in Brazil, Uganda and Thailand and on the development of a network for characterization of viruses world wide.

3. The sexually transmitted diseases unit had, for the first time, prepared regional estimates of the incidence of the major sexually transmitted diseases that were curable - gonorrhoea, syphilis and chlamydia and had developed a syndromic approach to treatment which was now being disseminated through a training course on syndromic management at peripheral levels of the health care system.

4. The third section of the report contained reports from organizations and agencies of the United Nations system, including the five other co-sponsors of the new United Nations AIDS Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Bank and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

5. Mr. METTALAMA (Joint Inspection Unit) introduced document A/50/126-E/1995/20, containing the first report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on communication for development programmes in the United Nations system, and document A/50/126/Add.1-E/1995/20/Add.1 containing the comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) thereon. The JIU report reflected increasing awareness at the international and national levels of the importance of communication, which it viewed as a conceptual notion in its own right. Communication was a dynamic two-way process involving active popular participation, as contrasted with information, which was a one-way technique for

the dissemination of knowledge. The recommendations contained in the report were designed to improve communication in development programmes, and suggested better tools to make communication more effective, called for regular inter-agency cooperation without additional bureaucracy, and were intended to improve coordination.

6. The report had been discussed by ACC, the Economic and Social Council, the Executive Board of UNESCO and the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC). ACC had supported the report's conclusions and recommendations. The Executive Board had in particular supported those conclusions relating to public information and communication functions, coordination between communications operations at Headquarters and in the field, the participation of the beneficiaries of development and two-way communication strategies.

7. Concern had been expressed that new layers of bureaucracy would be established if the JIU's proposal in recommendation 4 (b) to establish a communication coordinating committee at the country level was accepted. However, he had concluded from his on-site research that existing arrangements in the field were not adequately structured to coordinate communication in development programmes. He did not agree with ACC that the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC) could assume responsibilities for communication. That alternative would cause confusion between information and communication, and the distinction between the two was the foundation of the report. JUNIC participants were experts on information, while communication required, for the reasons explained in the report, different qualifications and expertise. As to the observation by some CPC representatives that the report should have addressed the role of telecommunications technology more thoroughly, he emphasized that the report's purpose had been to examine the "notional" aspect of communication, which should not be confused with the technical tools and the media aspects. An examination of informatics technologies would have been a diversion from the objectives of the investigation. ACC's general comments were well focused in that regard.

8. As to recommendation 11 on the importance of communication in peace-keeping operations, ACC and UNESCO had appreciated the innovative application of communication to humanitarian assistance and peace-keeping operations. CPC, on the contrary, had expressed reservations in that regard. In his view, the justification for extending the notion of communication to peace-keeping operations lay in the direct link between peace and development. Peace-keeping operations had in numerous instances laid the groundwork for peace-building, in which development played a substantial role. Communication could not be ignored at that stage and at subsequent start-up phases of peace-building operations. The Department of Peace-keeping Operations had agreed that more attention should be focused on ensuring adequate communication with regard to such operations.

9. Mr. TOBY (Director, Division for Policy Coordination and Economic and Social Council Affairs of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development), referring to the working relationship between the Council and the Assembly, said that the problem of multiple consideration needed to be addressed, particularly in view of the emerging trend whereby the Council's high-level and coordination segments were serving as preparatory bodies for the Assembly. Any review of that relationship should look into whether the Council

should not normally be expected to dispose of most matters before it in accordance with its Charter authority and the relevant General Assembly resolutions and limit its preparatory role to a few identifiable areas.

10. Recent experience indicated that Member States were still not fully satisfied with the Council's working methods and organization of work. Among the areas on which attention had focused was the length and spacing of the substantive session. One possible solution to the problems that had emerged would be to have the Council maintain one substantive session a year but to split it into two segments: a broadened high-level segment, which would also incorporate the coordination and operational activities segments, and a general segment, which would enable the Council to focus on its overall guidance, monitoring and management role. The Council would thus hold one organizational session, one resumed organizational session and a substantive session divided into two focused segments.

11. It had become clear that in order for the results of the high-level segment to have any policy resonance, the issues of choice of theme, outcome and follow-up needed to be further addressed. Themes could be divided into two categories, those deriving from the role of the Council in the area of policy integration and those encompassing urgent and emerging issues. On the matter of outcome and follow-up, the extent to which the summary of the President of the Council had an impact required close examination. With regard to the coordination segment, he noted that the Council had decided in its agreed conclusions 1995/1 to select the theme related to the follow-up to conferences one year in advance so as to allow for adequate preparations; the other theme for the coordination segment would continue to be selected the same year it was to be considered. The Secretariat continued to hold the view that it would be preferable if both themes were decided a year in advance.

12. With regard to the operational activities segment, he noted that the conduct and organization of the high-level part of the segment required further examination as it was proving difficult to select a single theme which fostered a development dialogue at ministerial level. The exchange of views with the heads of the specialized agencies and programmes and funds of the United Nations was another area needing improvement. It had developed into a dialogue between the Council and the executive heads of the programmes and funds of the United Nations and would benefit greatly from the involvement of executive heads of other organizations. Despite the directive contained in General Assembly resolution 48/162, the Council had yet to position itself to carry out its overview functions effectively, set priorities or integrate the policies and activities of the programmes and funds.

13. With regard to the general segment, it offered the only opportunity for the Council to carry out its responsibility of reviewing, monitoring and integrating the work of its subsidiary bodies.

14. With regard to the subsidiary machinery in the economic, social and related fields, Member States might wish to consider whether the current arrangement, whereby most matters dealt with by the Council were brought to the attention of the General Assembly and the work of most bodies of the Assembly were also brought to the attention of the Council was really cost-effective.

15. The roots of the documentation crisis in the United Nations were systemic. While more efficient use of technological innovations and more effective planning on the part of the Secretariat could help ease the problem, it was unlikely that the documentation crisis would abate as long as the number of bodies and meetings continued to increase.

16. Introducing the report of the Secretary-General on progress made in providing safe water supply and sanitation for all during the first half of the 1990s (A/50/213-E/1995/87), he noted that in order to achieve full water supply and sanitation service coverage by the year 2000, the rate of progress would, in most cases, have to be much higher than at present. The situation was particularly serious in Africa, where an estimated 180 million people lacked access to safe water and some 462 million lacked access to sanitation, and in the Asia and Pacific region, where only 15 per cent of the population was reported to receive suitable services, leaving some 1.8 billion people lacking access to sanitation.

17. It had become evident that provision of water supply and sanitation services for all could not depend exclusively on public investment. Significant acceleration in the provision of services could only come about with the active involvement of the private sectors, local communities and through the generation of financial resources through cost-recovery measures. The situation was particularly critical in connection with the generation of an effective demand for sanitation services, where the neglect of the needs of the urban and rural poor was most evident.

18. Mr. MENENDEZ (Spain), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that in spite of the successive reforms of the Economic and Social Council and, in particular, those brought about by adoption of resolutions 45/264 and 48/162, the Council still lacked any real capacity for evaluating or influencing the operations of the United Nations machinery. The high-level segment devoted to the development of Africa had been disappointing. The role of that segment should be reinforced through improved methods for selecting the theme, a more focused dialogue with the heads of the international and trade institutions on the basis of a joint report and by giving more weight to the conclusions of the segment. The operational activities segment had shown improvements but further work was needed in the preparation of the high-level part of that segment so as to encourage broader ministerial participation. Moreover, practical steps such as the one put forward by the European Union in its contribution to chapter III of the proposed agenda for development would be necessary to further enhance that segment.

19. The agreed conclusions relating to the coordinated follow-up to and implementation of the results of major international conferences in the economic, social and related fields in the framework of the coordination segment were a significant step forward for a better coordination of the United Nations system and could contribute to a more integrated and efficient implementation of the outcome of the recent cycle of relevant United Nations conferences. Those conclusions should be implemented expeditiously. The European Union believed that, in view of the coordinating role assigned to the Council under the Charter of the United Nations, the effective functioning of the coordination segment was of the utmost importance. With respect to the general segment which continued

to work inadequately, a radical streamlining of its agenda was necessary to enable it to review in depth the recommendations of the Council's subsidiary bodies. The Council should also ensure the harmonization and coordination of the agendas and multi-year work programmes of the functional commissions by promoting a clearer division of labour among them and by providing clear policy guidance.

20. Mr. MELEKH (Russian Federation) said that the Council's role of coordination within the United Nations system had become more tangible. The agreed conclusions emerging from the coordination segment should enable the United Nations system, including the Council and its subsidiary bodies, to address and resolve problems more directly. Consideration should be given to the role of the Committee for Programme Coordination under the new conditions. The absence of appropriate interaction between the Council and the Committee hindered the Council from carrying out its functions as the major coordinator in the United Nations system. It would be advisable to institutionalize brief working sessions of the Council devoted to matters of coordination and the work of individual segments of the substantive section.

21. While the importance of the high-level segment had been confirmed, long, drawn-out political statements had diminished its effectiveness. In future, themes for discussion should be chosen at least a few months before the substantive session, preferably the preceding year. The Council had yet to develop an effective format for dialogue with heads of the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization. Dialogue within the high-level segment could gain if it were more thorough. Statements by heads of delegations should be strictly limited, for example, to seven minutes. The triennial review should include a segment devoted to development operational activities which would make it possible to carry out a dialogue with the administration of all the operational funds and programmes. A high level of representation at such meetings could be guaranteed if they were scheduled just prior to the dialogue with heads of institutions.

22. Ms. YANG Yanyi (China) said that no further attempts at reform should be made until there had been a general review and analysis of the restructuring and revitalization process. Haste would only create confusion. Revitalization of the Council's work should be based on the mandates defined in the Charter of the United Nations and in the relevant resolutions as well as on the objectives and tasks set out by the recent international conferences relating to development. The ultimate aim was to enhance international economic cooperation and promote development in the developing countries. Streamlining of the Council's functions and pursuit of cost-effectiveness should not be carried out at the expense of important organs. Such an approach would weaken the United Nations capacity to promote economic growth, sustainable development and social progress. Member States should demonstrate their political will by increasing their financial input into development.

23. She expressed concern at the fact that proposals by Member States for increasing the transparency of the Secretariat's activities had been given scant regard; at the same time, there was a tendency to weaken the role of the Council and its members. Improving the work of the Secretariat was just one aspect of the question of increasing efficiency; it should not result in a restriction of

Member States' responsibilities. The United Nations was an intergovernmental organization and its work should reflect Member States' commitments and serve their overall interests.

24. Mr. MODOUX (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)), referring to the report contained in document A/50/126, said that it was vital to strengthen the role of communications in projecting United Nations institutions but, above all, in supporting and promoting the Organization's activities and programmes to the communities for whom they were intended, in order to enlist their cooperation and active participation. Communications were especially relevant in the area of development where, more often than not, programmes were imposed arbitrarily from above without any opportunity for the communities concerned to express their views. Highlighting the recommendations which, in his view, required priority action he said that a "communications" component should be incorporated into all future strategies or programmes in order to take into account the views and aspirations of those for whom they were intended so as to create a climate of trust through dialogue. Traditional forms of communication such as story-telling, theatre, or puppetry could be used to get the message across. Secondly, a small group of communications specialists could be set up within the Organization who could be sent out into the field to work alongside national or regional managers familiar with local customs and traditions. Lastly, all programmes should include a "communications" component; that would be justifiable in view of the high overall investments at stake. His agency, which had a fair amount of experience in the area of communications for development, would be willing to study the proposal further. Communications programmes were already being used to further basic education, consolidate peace in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Burundi and promote democracy and human rights. He suggested conducting a pilot communications project to assess the value of such a practice.

25. Mr. BEHBEHANI (World Health Organization (WHO)) stressed the importance of the fight against malaria in developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where 90 per cent of cases occurred, claiming the lives of one million children a year. The 1992 Ministerial Conference at Amsterdam had adopted a global malaria control strategy which galvanized international and institutional support for control of the disease. WHO had worked with the agencies concerned to develop a plan of action comprising four main elements: gaining global political support for a malaria control strategy; working with national organizations to bring their policies into line with the global strategy; providing training for health service staff and other personnel; and securing additional programme funding. Having secured international political support for the plan, WHO had helped 35 African States devise action programmes, 10 of which were currently at the implementation stage. Training had been offered to thousands of staff in various countries and an assessment of global training needs was under way. Moreover, additional funding had been provided by donor States and others. WHO was determined to continue working with all concerned parties in the ongoing struggle against the disease.

26. Mr. CACCIAGUERRA (Italy) welcomed the comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit, contained in document A/50/126/Add.1-E/1995/20/Add.1. Improved communications systems did indeed play an important role in development and the provision of humanitarian

assistance. The United Nations agencies should develop a systematic approach to training communications personnel, with discussions on the agenda for development and reform processes focusing on improved communications systems as a means of enhancing the Organization's effectiveness.

27. Mr. AL-KHATIB (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the Secretary-General's report on the social and economic effects of Israeli settlements on the Palestinian people in the Palestinian territory and the Arab population of the Syrian Golan (A/50/262-E/1995/59) had clearly shown that Israel continued to install and enlarge Israeli settlements in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan, an area which it had annexed in contravention of the principle of non-acquisition of territory by force, in violation of Security Council resolution 497 (1981).

28. The report provided evidence of Israel's determination to ignore the interests of the Arab citizens of the occupied Syrian Arab Golan and their right of access to natural resources there. In 1994, the Israeli Minister for Industry had declared Israel's Golan policy a matter of top national priority. Furthermore, the Judaization of Arab place names and the use of names taken from the Torah for the settlements in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan constituted a clear attempt to give a Hebrew identity to occupied Syrian Arab territory.

29. On the pretext of security, Syrian citizens in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan had had their land taken from them, had been prevented from marketing their crops and had been robbed even of well and rain water. Denied a range of health, educational and other public services, they were the victims of a clear policy of discrimination in favour of new Jewish settlers who had been lured into settling in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan. The Israeli Government had further tried to impose Israeli nationality on Arab citizens in the area by depriving them of an Arab education, censoring schoolbooks and imposing the Hebrew language. Those actions and Israel's consistent refusal to comply with international calls for an end to human rights abuses illustrated that country's blatant disregard for international law and for conventions on the protection of persons living under occupation.

30. Ms. REBONG (Philippines), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, expressed concern over the continuing deterioration of the quality of water and sanitation services in rural parts of developing countries, which was highlighted in the Secretary-General's report (A/50/213). It was clear that poverty was a major contributing factor to poor water quality and the eradication of poverty had to go hand in hand with increased financial assistance for water sanitation projects if a serious water crisis in developing countries was to be averted. Donor Governments, international financial and development institutions and non-governmental organizations should respond favourably to requests for grants and concessional financing of projects aimed at improving sanitation and sewerage and waste water treatment.

31. The United Nations, bilateral development agencies and non-governmental organizations had a vital role to play in the fight against malaria and cholera in developing States, while the World Food Programme was of central importance in guaranteeing food security. The Group supported a target of $1.3 billion in contributions for the Programme for the period 1997-1998 and hoped that a pledging conference would be held in 1996.

32. Mrs. HOMANOVSKA (Ukraine) said that much positive work had been done on the revitalization and restructuring of the Economic and Social Council since the adoption of Assembly resolution 48/162, and that the importance of the high-level segment had been demonstrated. The main theme of the high-level segment should be chosen well in advance, and discussions at the high-level segments should be accompanied by action-oriented decisions. The Council should carry out an annual review of work done on social and economic programmes, and transmit the findings to the General Assembly. It should give priority to greater coordination between the United Nations and international institutions with regard to development programmes, while leaving more time at high-level meetings for the operational activities segment, with the active involvement of the agencies. The coordinating role of the Council should be enhanced, and the office of the resident coordinator should be strengthened, allowing for a more effective alignment of country strategies.

33. With regard to the general segment of Council meetings, the number of resolutions and decisions should be reduced, and more time should be accorded to certain issues which needed to be discussed individually rather than clustered together with other items. The regional economic groups had done important work, and the Economic Commission for Europe merited particular praise in view of the help it had given to transition States.

34. Overall, there was no need for radical reform of the Council, but rather for more systematic exploitation of existing structures and resources. As the powers of subsidiary and regional bodies had been broadened, there should be a review of their mandates, to facilitate their greater cooperation with the major international institutions.

35. Mr. FLORENCIO (Brazil) said that his delegation attached the utmost importance to efforts to make the work of the United Nations in the field of development more meaningful and believed that efforts to strengthen cooperation for development should be given the same attention as efforts to improve performance in the area of peace and security. Although the General Assembly remained the highest organ providing policy guidance on development issues, the need for a representative body with limited membership which could focus on specific economic and social issues could not be underestimated.

36. The Economic and Social Council had a central role to play in ensuring effective and coordinated follow-up to United Nations conferences. The functional commissions also played a crucial role in such follow-up and in areas constituting the core of United Nations activities in the economic and social field, and their composition, programme of work and working methods should be revitalized.

37. The Council should be called upon to play a greater role in addressing macroeconomic policy issues. A reformed Council exercising an essentially deliberative role could assist the General Assembly in addressing central economic issues such as trade, finance and technology. To that end, the Council should develop a closer and more focused dialogue with the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the specialized agencies. In order to embark on that dialogue, the Council must make more efficient use of United Nations expertise on economic issues, which would be accomplished only if

the level of substantive discussions thereon improved. To that end, greater interaction among bodies with technical competence on macroeconomic issues and closer interaction between delegations and those technical bodies were required. The latter objective should be achieved through informal initiatives, such as briefings, hearings and brainstorming sessions, to debate central economic issues. Those initiatives would also benefit from inputs from universities, the private sector and non-governmental organizations and would stimulate a more concrete and focused debate, particularly on macroeconomic issues. Such meetings would require virtually no additional expenses.

38. In conclusion, he said that the political commitment to engage in constructive dialogue on the reform of the United Nations in the social and economic fields was a prerequisite to achieving the goal of revitalizing the role of the United Nations in the field of development.

39. Mr. HAMID (Sudan) said that his delegation fully subscribed to the comments made by the representative of Syria.

40. Turning to the report of the Secretary-General on preventive action and intensification of the struggle against malaria in developing countries, particularly in Africa (A/50/180), he said that it was comprehensive and demonstrated the concern of the international community regarding epidemics of disease. He welcomed the strategic approach to combating persistent epidemics that was reflected in the goals to be achieved by the end of the current century. The contribution of WHO and other specialized agencies in operational activities to control malaria and other diseases was greatly appreciated and should be encouraged.

41. Malaria continued to be a major health problem in his country and claimed many lives each day. An infant mortality rate of 89 per 1,000 had prompted the Government to attach the highest priority to controlling the disease. The meagre resources available for that purpose fell far short of the requirements.

42. In response to relevant General Assembly and Economic and Social Council resolutions, his Government had elaborated a project proposal on malaria control, which had subsequently been revised in the light of input from WHO and on the basis of the principles of the revised Global Malaria Control Strategy. It was estimated that the implementation of the proposal would require US$ 39.8 million for the first biennium, and a total of US$ 103 million for the six-year duration of the project. In keeping with the Global Strategy, insecticide use would be kept to a minimum. He drew attention to paragraphs 27 and 28 of document A/50/180 and said that his country met the criteria outlined for selecting the countries which would receive national control programme support.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.